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Report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics

Note by the Secretary-General

In accordance with a request of the Statistical Commission at its thirty-sixth session,** the Secretary-General has the honour to transmit to the Commission the report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics. The Commission is requested to take note of the report.

* E/CN.3/2006/1.

** *Official Records of the Economic and Social Council, 2005, Supplement No. 4* (E/2005/24), chap. I.B.

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Report of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics

Purpose

The main objectives of the Rio Group on Poverty Statistics are to harness the experience and concerns of different groups and organizations in the world that are working on the measurement, interpretation and use of poverty statistics, especially when such work is being conducted by, or in close contact with, statistical offices. The identification of the indicators, methodologies and statistical sources being used should allow the preparation of documents or reports containing the most up-to-date information on matters of poverty measurements, common procedures and best practices. At the same time, the most important difficulties could be identified and experts working with similar problems and topics could cooperate and thereby improve the quality and relevance of measurements. The experience obtained will allow the Rio Group to finish preparing a Compendium of Good Practices to be presented to the members of the Statistical Commission for final comments at the end of 2005.

Year organized

1996.

Participants

Countries

Argentina, Australia, Belarus, Botswana, Brazil, Canada, Chile, France, India, Indonesia, Mexico, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Peru, Portugal, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and Uruguay.

Organizations and other institutions

Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía, Economic Commission for Africa (ECE), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat), Human Sciences Research Council, Inter-American Development Bank, International Labour Organization (ILO), Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning, London School of Economics and Political Science, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Pan American Health Organization (PAHO)/World Health Organization (WHO), Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (PARIS21), Townsend Centre for International Poverty Research, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Statistics Division and World Bank.

Meetings

- First meeting, Santiago, 7-9 May 1997
- Second meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 13-15 May 1998
- Third meeting, Lisbon, 22-24 November 1999
- Fourth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 15-17 October 2001
- Fifth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 13-15 November 2002
- Sixth meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 12-14 November 2003
- Seventh meeting, Rio de Janeiro, 6-8 December 2004

Topics considered

Measurements oriented towards synthetic indicators or policy for poverty alleviation; analytical classifications of synthetic indicators of poverty statistics: absolute poverty (poverty lines and unmet basic needs approach), relative poverty, objective and subjective poverty; poverty dynamics; relationships between poverty and other conceptual categories used in social policy, such as social exclusion, vulnerability and social rights; microlevel approach (household and individuals) to poverty measurements associated with policy for poverty alleviation, international comparisons, international strategies to alleviate poverty, their objectives, goals and means of implementation, and strategies for the improvement of information.

For all those topics, issues in respect of methodologies and procedures more widely used within different measurements of poverty have been examined and compared. The Rio Group has identified: (a) the most important methodological and statistical challenges in which participants are working; (b) statistical sources, concepts and classifications used for poverty measurements; (c) work under way to improve the timeliness and quality of sources and estimates; (d) international experience with respect to moving towards common practices in the measurement of poverty; and (e) institutional agreements towards the comparability of measurements in different regions.

Products

The agenda and documents of the meetings of the Rio Group can be found on its website (www.ibge.gov.br/poverty). Papers and final reports of the first four meetings have been published by ECLAC, bibliographies of which can be accessed from the ECLAC publications website (http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/default.asp?idioma=IN or for Spanish: http://www.eclac.org/publicaciones/) under the document codes LC/R.1814, LC/R.1960, LC/R.1998 and LC/R.2096.

The Compendium in progress pays special attention to established practices in poverty measurement. Established practices are those carried out, on a continuous basis, by a national, regional or international organization that publishes periodically results on poverty measurement and the methodologies and statistical sources utilized, and disseminates those estimates publicly. The practices of a few

research institutes, closely related to official measurements, have also been included.

The practices are classified under five approaches, encompassing: absolute, relative and subjective poverty lines, unmet basic needs or deprivations, and the combined deprivation and poverty lines approach. Health and child poverty measurements are included in the approaches encompassing absolute poverty lines and unmet basic needs, respectively. The document presents in each case the most important steps of the procedures, following a common structure that includes the identification of poverty standards, household resources with which to meet the standards, units of analysis, geographical disaggregation and sources of information. Comments on the nature and significance of the challenges faced by each approach are also included.

The Compendium has been devised in order to provide the reader with a clear picture of the content of different approaches and of the requirements involved in adopting or improving any of the measurement approaches. An effort has been made to include a wide array of options for each approach in order that the reader may identify the state of the art and may measure the distance that must be traversed to achieve it by a country that has little or no recent experience. The Compendium has aimed at providing a fair description of these options and has avoided making explicit recommendations that reflect the authors' preferences.

The final chapter presents three transversal topics: the relation of each approach with different kinds of policies for poverty alleviation; the challenges and progress achieved in the area of international comparisons; and some potential statistical information strategies to cope with the increasing demand in the area. This chapter should be an input for discussions of the Statistical Commission in respect of approving activities towards improvement of international cooperation in this area.

Planned activities

The Rio Group has compiled a significant number of documents that reflect the work completed or under way in the area of poverty statistics. At its seventh meeting, the Rio Group made an evaluation of the available documentation and decided that it was in a position to finish the Compendium during 2005. A decision was taken on the chapters to be included, on the distribution of responsibilities, and on a calendar of activities.

Expected future products (dates)

After the 2006 session of the Statistical Commission, comments of members of the Commission will be processed and introduced in March, and a final version of the Compendium will be edited in April and May, in order that it may be published in English in June.

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